JOAN OF THE SWORD HAND

By S. R. CROCKETT, Author of "The Raiders," &c

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CHAPTER XIII.

Joan Stands Within Her Danger.

So soon as Werner von Orseln returned to Castle Kernsberg with news of the forcing of the Alla and the overwhelming numbers of the Muscovite hordes, the sad-eyed Duchess of Hohenstein became once more Joan of the Sword Hand.

The invading army must have numbered thirty thousand, at least. There were, all told, about two thousand in Kernsberg. Von Orseln, indeed, could easily have raised more. Nay, they would have come in of themselves by hundreds to fight for their Duchess, but the little town could not feed more.

When Werner von Orseln and Peter Balta met the invader at the fords of the Alla, Maurice von Lynar and Alt Pikker had remained with Joan, nominally to assist her dispositions, but really to form a check upon the impetuosity of her temper.

Now Von Orseln was back again. The fords of the Alla were forced, and the fighting strength of Kernsberg united itself in the Eagle's Nest to make its final stand.

Aloft on the highest ramparts there was a terrace walk which the Sparhawk much affected, specially when he was on guard at night. It looked towards the east, and from it the first glimpse of the Courtlanders would be obtained.

Presently the chief captain's step was heard on the stone turnpike.

"Ha, Sparhawk," he cried, "this is cold cheer! Why could we not have talked comfortably in hall, with a beaker of mead at one's elbow?"

"I wanted to speak with you on a matter we cannot mention elsewhere," said Maurice von Lynar.

"How long can we hold out if they besiege us?"

"Two months, certainly—with luck, three!"

"And what of the Duchess Joan?" persisted the young man.

"Why, in the same time she will be dead or wed!" said Von Orseln, with an affectation of carelessness easily seen through.

"We must get her away to a place of safety," said the young man. Von Orseln laughed.

"Get her? Who would persuade or compel our lady? Whither would she go? Would she be safer there than here? Would the Courtlander not find out in twenty-four hours that there was no Joan of the Sword Hand in Kernsberg, and follow her trail?"

"We must persuade her—capture her, compel her, if necessary. Kernsberg cannot for long hold out against both the Muscovite and the Courtlander."

"What? Capture Joan of the Sword Hand and carry her off? The mead buzzes in the boy's head. He grows dotty with anxiety and too much hard ale."

"Von Orseln," said the youth, with simple earnestness, not heeding his taunts, "I have thought deeply. I see no way out of it but this. Our lady will eagerly go on reconnaissance if you represent it as necessary. You must take ten good men and ride north, far north, even to the edges of the Baltic, to a place I know of, which none but I and one other can find. There, with a few trusty fellows to guard her, she will be safe till the push of the times is over."

"But how," said Von Orseln, meditating, "will you prevent her absence being known? The passage of so large a party may easily be traced and remembered. Though our folk are true enough and loyal enough, sooner or later what is known in the Castle is known in the town, and what is

"What? Capture Joan of the Sword Hand and carry her off!"

known in the town becomes known to the enemy!"

Maurice von Lynar leaned forward towards his chief captain and whispered a few words in his ear.

"Ah!" he said, and nodded. Then, after a pause for thought, he added, "That is none so ill thought on for a beardless younker! I will think it over, sleep on it, and tell you my opinion to-morrow! At any rate," the chief captain growled to himself, "you have a pretty part set for me. I may forthwith order my shroud. I shall never be able to face my lady again!"

* * * * *

The Duchess Joan was in high spirits. It had been judged necessary, in consultation with her chief officers, to ride a reconnaissance to ascertain whether the advancing enemy had cut Kernberg off towards the north. On this matter Von Orseln thought that her Highness had better judge for herself. Here at last was something to be done. It was almost like the old foraying days, but now in a more desperate cause.

No one in all Castle Kernsberg was to know of the departure of this cavalcade. The Sparhawk was appointed to command during Von Orseln's absence. Ten men only were to go, and these picked and sifted riders—chosen because of their powers of silence—and because, being unmarried, they had no wives to worm secrets out of them.

Joan and her chief captain rode on ahead. Von Orseln glancing keenly about him, and Joan riding free and careless, as in old days when she overpassed the hills to drive a prey from the lands of her father's enemies.

It was grey morning when they came to a goatherd's hut at the top of the green valley. Already they had passed the bounds of Hohenstein by half a dozen miles. The goatherd had led his light skipping train to the hills for the day, and the rude and chaotic remains of his breakfast were still on the table. Boris and Jorian cleared these away, and, with the trained alacrity of seasoned men at arms, they placed before the party a breakfast prepared with speed out of which they had brought with them and those things which they had found to their hand by foraging in the cottage of the goatherd—to-wit, sliced neat's tongue dried in the smoke, bread of fine wheat which Jorian had carried all the way in a net at his saddle bow. Boris had charge of the wine skins, and upon a shelf above the door they found a great butter pot full of freshly made curded goat's milk, very delicious both to taste and smell.

Of these things they ate and drank largely, Joan and Von Orseln being together at the upper end of the table. Boris and Jorian had to sit with them, though much againht their wills, being (spite of their sweethearts) more accustomed to the company of honest men at arms than to the practice of dainty eating in ladies' society.

Soon Joan of the Sword Hand rose to her feet, for the ex-men at arms had few words to say.

"Let us now mount and ride homeward," she said, "there are no enemy to be found on this northerly road. We shall be more fortunate upon another occasion."

Then Werner von Orseln nerved himself for a battle more serious than any he had ever fought at the elbow of Henry the Lion of Hohenstein.

"My lady," he said, standing up and bowing gravely before her, "you see here eleven men who love you far above their lives, of whom I am the chief. Two others also there are, who, though not of our nation, are in heart joined to us, especially in this thing that we have done. With all respect, your Highness cannot go back. We have come out, not to make a reconnaissance, but to put your Grace in a place of safety till the storm blows over."

The Duchess had slowly risen to her feet, with her hand on the sword which swung at her belt.

"You have suddenly gone mad, Werner!" she said; "let us have no more of this. I bid you mount and ride. Back to Kernsberg, I say! Ye are not such fools and traitors as to deliver the maiden Castle, the Eagle's Nest of Hohenstein, into the hands of our enemies?"

"Nay," said Von Orseln, looking steadily upon the ground, "that will we not do. Kernsberg is in good hands, and will fight bravely. But we cannot hold out with our few folk and scanty provender against the leaguer of thirty thousand. Nevertheless we will not permit you to sacrifice yourself for our sakes or for the sake of the women and children of the city."

Joan drew her sword.

"Werner von Orseln, will you obey me, or must I slay you with my hand?" she cried.

The chief captain yet further bowed his head and abased his eyes.

"We have thought also of this," he made answer. "Me you may kill, but these that are with me will defend themselves, though they will not strike one they love more than their lives. But man by man we have sworn to do this thing. At all hazards you must abide in our hands till the danger is overpast. For me (this he added in a deeper tone), I am your immediate officer. There is none to come between us. It is your right to slay me if you will. Mine is the responsibility for this deed, though the design was not mine. Here is my sword. Slay your chief captain with it if you will. He has faithfully served your house for five-and-thirty years. 'Tis perhaps time he rested now."

And with these words Werner von Orseln took his sword by the point and offered the hilt to his mistress.

Joan of the Sword Hand shook with mingled passion and helplessness, and her eyes were dark and troubled.

"Put up your blade," she said, striking the hilt with her hand; "if you have not deserved death, no more have I deserved this! But you said that the design was not yours. Who, then, has dared to plot against the liberty of Joan of Hohenstein?"

"I would I could claim the honor," said Werner the chief captain; "but truly the matter came from Maurice von Lynar, the Dane. It is to his mother, who after the death of the Count von Lynar continued to dwell in a secret strength on the Baltic shore, that we are conducting your Grace!"

"Maurice von Lynar?" exclaimed Joan, astonished. "He remains in Castle Kernsberg then?"

"Aye," said Werner, relieved by her tone, "he will take your place when danger comes. In morning twilight or at dusk he makes none so ill a Lady Duchess, and, i' faith, his sword hand is brisk enough. If the town be taken, better that he than you be found in Castle Kernsberg. Is the thing not well invented, my lady?"

Werner looked up hopefully. He thought he had pleaded his cause well.

"Traitor! supplanter!" cried Joan indignantly; "this Dane in my place!

"Werner von Orseln, will you obey me?"

I will hang him from the highest window in the Castle of Kernsberg, if ever I win back to mine own again."

"My lady," said Werner, gently and respectfully, "your servant Von Lynar bade me tell you that he would as faithfully and loyally take your place now as he did on a former occasion!"

"Ah," said Joan, smiling wanly with a quick change of mood, "I hope he will be more ready to give up his privileges on this occasion than on that!"

She was thinking of the Princess Margaret and the heritage of trouble upon which, as the Count von Loen, she had caused the Sparhawk to enter.

Then a new thought seemed to strike her.

"But my nurse and my women—how can he keep the imposture secret? He may pass before the stupid eyes of men. But they——"

"They have been sent out of harm's way into Plassenburg. There is not a woman born of woman in all the Castle of Kernsberg!"

"Yes," mused Joan, "I have indeed been fairly cozened. I gave that order also by the Dane's advice. Well, let him have his run. We will reeve him a firm collar of hemp at the end of it, and maybe for Werner von Orseln also, as a traitor alike to his bread and his mistress. Till then I hope you will both enjoy playing your parts."

The chief captain bowed.

"I am content, my lady," he said respectfully.

"Now, good jailers all," cried Joan, "lead on. I will follow. Or would you prefer to carry me with you handcuffed and chained? I will go with you in what fashion seemeth good to my masters!"

She paused and looked around the little goatherd's hut.

"Only," she said, nodding her head, "I warn you I will take my own time and manner of coming back!"

There was a deep silence as the men drew their belts tighter and prepared to mount and depart.

(To be continued.)

HER FIGURE HER FORTUNE.

Womanly Vanity That Makes Fine Arms a Valuable Asset.

It was at a semi-Bohemian reception, where the writers and artists were wondering who had money and the other half were wondering what this or that long-haired man or queerly dressed woman did. The stranger guest sat in a corner and asked questions about everybody, wondering at the queer assortment of ex-husbands and ex-wives and all the would-bes. At length a woman of middle age but superb figure entered.

"Well, who is she?" he asked. "I don't believe she does anything."

"Oh, doesn't she? She makes a lot of money. Don't you notice what a stunning figure she has?"

The man admitted that he had observed it.

"Surely not an artists' model?" he exclaimed.

"Not exactly, but she poses for the figure at a fashionable photographer's."

"But not in the——"

"Of course not. But you know lots of would-be beauties who get their pictures in the magazines are sadly lacking in fine figures and especially smooth necks and statuesque arms. Hers are simply perfect and she poses for the figure and the the clever photographer fastens on the other woman's head, and everybody is delighted. Don't you ever tell, though, for nobody is supposed to know."—New York Sun.

Has Two Noms de Plume.

Sibylle Gabrielle Marie Antoinette de Riquette de Mirabeau, Countess de Martell de Janville, writes under the pseudonym of "Gyp" and illustrates under that of "Bob."

ENCOURAGING TEDDY

By Cosmo Hamilton

(Copyright, 1906, by Joseph B. Bowles.)

When two women are sitting over a glowing fire in the broad daylight, and one is married and the other is not, they invariably talk of two things—dress and servants. But when the light has waned, and the glow of the fire fills the corners of the room with dancing shadows, even dress and servants are left, and the conversation invariably turns—to the other great stock subject: man.

"Of course, I didn't do it to be thanked; but I think you might have murmured one little word of gratitude to me for asking Mr. Carr down. I mean, ordinary politeness requires some attention even from you."

Eva looked up at Mrs. Clutton from a deep dell of hot coal which had been formed between the bars. "Thank you," she said; and then, added, "for nothing."

Mrs. Clutton was one of those long, slight, tired women who always dress to perfection, are never ruffled, never different, who are able to hurry while appearing to dawdle, to be exceedingly annoyed without the least apparent effort, to laugh heartily without making a sound, and to talk with great animation, without in any way disturbing the undulating, velvety drawl with which they are born.

"You might talk to me from now till the middle of next week," she said, "and then you couldn't convince me that you are not glad that he is here."

A laugh sprang across Eva's face, to be instantly hunted away by a sigh. "My dear Enid, I haven't the faintest desire to prove that I am not hopelessly in love with him. Unfortunately it is known to everybody in this world except the man himself. And the absurdity of the whole thing—the thing that makes me feel like half a tomato on a gridiron—is that he's just as much in love with me as I am with him, and that's a very great deal indeed."

"I don't see where the absurdity comes in. If you are both in love as much as all that, why don't you marry him?"

Half-tragically, half-comically, wholly in the manner—so far as we can guess—of a petulant angel, Eva sprang to her feet, and flinging her collection of cushions far and wide, commenced dashing about the room, greatly to its danger.

"Marry him! marry him! Don't I want to marry him? Isn't it my one ambition in life to become the wife of this silly, foolish, timid, wretch? It's all fine for you to sit there and say those easy, insane things; but I can't run away with the man, can I? I can't buy a toy pistol, meet the poor dear in a dark passage and shriek, 'Marry me, or you die!' can I? I can't chase him into a conservatory, flop on my knees, and cry, 'Teddy, I love you with a love that is almost indiscreet; be, oh, be my husband,' can I, can I, can I?" Eva caught one of the cushions a beautiful kick, and sent it flying against a whatnot.

"Not very well," said Mrs. Clutton. "But shall I tell you what you can and will do?"

"What?" cried Eva, eagerly.

"Smash my precious china if you kick cushions about like that. . . . The point is, have you given him any encouragement?"

Eva laughed the laugh of theater scorn. "Encouragement? Why, my dear Enid, I have done everything a nicely-brought-up girl ought to do, and a good deal that she oughtn't.

During that time, a matter of perhaps a minute and a quarter—Mrs. Clutton had been thinking hard, although it would have been impossible to guess it from the placid state of her features.

"Eva," she said finally, "have you ever noticed that picture painted on the panel over the bookcase, of a girl sitting on an armchair with her eyes cast down, and with her hands folded meekly on her lap?"

"No," said Eva, "and if I had, what on earth has she to do with my horrid problem?"

Mrs. Clutton undulated on: "The figure of the girl works on a hinge, and sometimes when my husband had got into a boyish scrape and wanted to hear what his father said about it to his mother, he used to get his sister to pull the picture back, and sit in the girl's place to report to him what went on. A dishonorable and very fascinating proceeding. A chair was placed behind the picture in the next room, the floor of which is on a level with it, and in this kind of light it was impossible to tell the difference between the real and the unreal girl. . . . Now, don't you think—"

"Think! Think!" cried Eva, covering the permanently quiet Mrs. Clutton with kisses, "I should think I do think. Oh, Enid, you engineer! You want me to get into the picture; you want to bring Teddy here to see my new portrait; you want to leave him to say to me on a panel what he daren't say to me in the flesh; and then, when at last he cries: 'Oh, darling, my beautiful piquant, little beauty, I love you so, if only I could screw up courage to ask you to be my wife!' you want me to say: 'Teddy, you infant, I'm dying to be your wife.'"

"How wonderfully well—"

Before Mrs. Clutton could get any further Eva mounted upon the bookcase, had pushed back the panel, had caught up a chair from a corner of the little room which could just be seen through the aperture, and in a twinkling had become, for the first time in her life, a quiet, meek little figure with downcast eyes and folded hands.

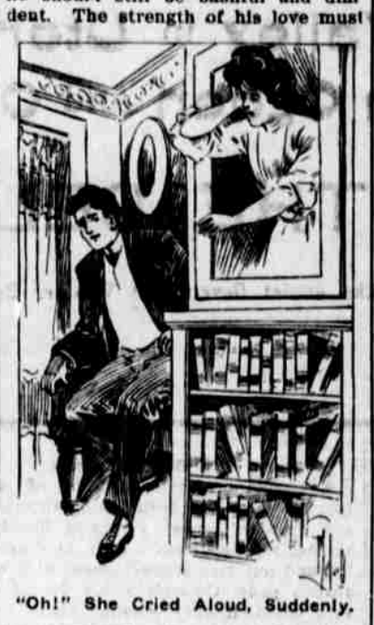
"How's that?" she asked, through a cascade of chuckles. "Are you certain you can't see my breathing? And do you think it matters if I blink every now and then?"

"Certain. The unsteady flicker of the fire in this dim light will make any blinking seem quite natural."

"Enid"—Eva looked down with suddenly earnest eyes—"if everything works well you shall choose whatever you like from my wedding presents. . . . S-s-s-sh! There's Teddy at the door. I know it by the way he clutches the handle."

Ten minutes later, after Mrs. Clutton had quietly led the conversation from comic opera to tobacco, from tobacco to Eva, and from that young woman to the new portrait of her above the bookcase, she asked Teddy to excuse her while she went to look for her little friend, and left the room. Teddy had his back to the picture as the door closed; but in the looking-glass over the fireplace he was amazed to see a handkerchief flutter hastily up to the picture's nose, and flutter as hastily back again—amazed, infinitely worried, and full of wonder.

During the first quarter of an hour he stood with his back to her, gazing at her in the looking glass. From the corner of her eye, Eva watched him with a kind of tingling amusement, immensely flattered at the thought that even in the presence of her portrait—a mere thing of oils—he should still be bashful and diffident. The strength of his love must



"Oh!" She Cried Aloud, Suddenly.

be enormous! In a moment or two, she argued, he would realize that she was merely a picture, and come and stand underneath her to examine more closely the wonderful fidelity of the portrait, the exquisite skill of the artist; and then, knowing that she could not hear anything he said, he would utter aloud all those burning words he had bottled up so long. In a moment or two . . .

Feeling hot all over, his dense head in a whirl, certain only that Eva had got into the picture in order to make a fool of him, Teddy sat down in the chair by the fire to try to transform the chaos of his brain into something approaching order.

During the next hour he remained motionless, not looking once in the direction of the picture. To him, the hour was a minute. To her, sitting in the same attitude, hardly breathing, hardly thinking, getting more and more hungry, the hour seemed a week, a year, an eternity. She made up her mind that when he did think aloud she would snap her fingers in his face and tell him, in scalding, bitter words, that she loathed him, and that sooner than marry him she would die a thousand deaths.

"Good gracious! There goes the gong for dinner! Oh, how awful, how horrible! What will they think? . . . Idiot! Creature! Why . . . why . . . Oh!" she cried aloud suddenly, forgetting everything under the influence of cramp. "Oh, oh!"

Teddy sprang across the room. "What's the matter? What's the matter?"

Desperately concerned, Teddy stood upon a chair, lifted Eva down from the picture with the huge gentleness of a six-foot-three man, placed her tenderly in a chair, and knelt at her feet. Her eyes were closed. He was certain she was dying. "Eva, my little darling, open your eyes! It's me, the man who loves you more than all the world." His grammar became shaky, his heart stone, his breathing cyclonic. "Eva, my sweetheart, my beloved, look at me, if only for a moment, and tell me before you die that you will be my wife."

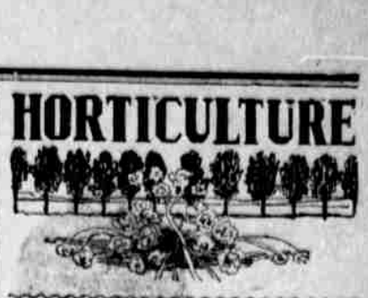
Of course, with the change of position the cramp had gone, and Eva knew that those symptoms were snares. She sat up coldly. "I have no intention of dying," she said; "and of course I will be your wife. But I think you are the most abject person it has ever been my misfortune to meet. . . . Yes, of course I love you, dearest Teddy; but think, think what you have made me suffer. The gong has rung and you don't know, never will know, how frightfully hungry I am."

HORTICULTURE

FALLING LEAVES.

The Scientific Reason for Their Dropping from Trees.

If we ask why leaves fall, it may be difficult to find a complete answer, but some of the advantages to the tree are apparent. The most rigorous season of the year is the winter, and at this time most of our trees are without leaves. Leaves are the most delicate parts of the tree and are poorly fitted to withstand the severity of northern winters, although we may notice the reduced size and firmer structure of those of the conifers which remain on the trees during cold weather. The absence of leaves makes the trees less exposed to being overturned or broken by the fierce blasts



LEAVES BEING CUT OFF.

Section of a Horse-chestnut Twig Enlarged.

of the winter's winds, but probably the greatest advantage to the tree is the very much smaller surface for the evaporation of water. During cold weather all plants absorb water very slowly and probably the greatest danger the tree has to meet during the winter is that more water will be lost by evaporation and transpiration than can be supplied by absorption. Then the vital process of food manufacture is almost entirely stopped by cold weather and hence the work of the leaves may be said to be done as the autumn temperature lowers.

The process by which leaves are removed from the trees is an interesting one, although they are neither pushed off by the newly-formed buds nor loosened by the frost. In order to understand this process, it is necessary to examine the structure of the petiole where it joins the twig. The horse-chestnut shows the various parts very plainly. The central portion of the twig is a cylinder of woody fibre, which, during the life of the tree, conveys the prepared food in a downward passage, the outer portion or fibres of the bark conducting the sap in its upward flow. One or more strands of woody conducting fibre passes out into the petiole of each leaf (A). As the season advances and preparatory to the falling of the leaves a layer of thin-walled cells forms at the base of the petiole (B). These cells are very similar to the cork cells found in the bark of the tree and check the passage of all fluids except through the central strand of fibres. Through this central strand most of the prepared food passes from the leaf to the tree, there to be used in growth or stored for another season, leaving in the leaf only useless waste products. As the cutting off layer is completed many of the cells in the center break down and nothing holds the leaf in place excepting the fibres of the central strand, then a light breeze or even the weight of the leaf is enough to snap this slender thread and the leaf flutters to the ground. The cells which cut off the leaf now form a protecting layer excluding all moisture from the twig.

Trees vary greatly with respect to the formation of this cutting off layer, says the Montreal Herald; in some like the horse-chestnut it is thick and corky, being easily seen by the naked eye, in the ash, butternut and many others it is well devoped, while in some like the beech it is scarcely present at all.

ORCHARD AND GARDEN.

Attend the horticultural meetings.

The lawn should be always kept in perfect condition.

Who has ever been able to use the surplus strawberries for vinegar or jam at a profit?

A hot solution of lye will kill peach borers. Not "hot air," though they are often the same!

All the sorting that apples require ought to be done when they are gathered, and if it is properly done there will be almost no risk at all in the matter of keeping.

There are two circumstances in favor of fall pruning of grape vines. There is little danger of bleeding and the work being done cannot be procrastinated in spring until too late, as is often done.

Little pruning need be done the first year if trees have been properly pruned when set. Cut off dead shoots and, later in the season, should rank growing shoots develop at places not needed, remove them or head them in.

Manure Bushes in Fall.

For best results currant bushes should be well manured in the fall and the manure plowed in so that the injured rootlets may have time during the winter months to replenish themselves. Plow quite shallow next to the bushes. Give shallow cultivation early in spring and at intervals during the summer.